

PATENT

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APPLICATION FOR UNITED STATES LETTERS PATENT

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TITLE:

STORAGE UNIT

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STORAGE UNIT

This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application Serial No. 60/240,469, filed October 13, 2000, the entire disclosure of which is hereby incorporated herein by reference.

5 BACKGROUND

The present invention relates generally to a storage unit, and in particular, to a modular storage unit.

Typically, storage units, such as file cabinets and the like, are made of one or more pieces of sheet metal or wood, which pieces typically are permanently affixed together by welding and the like. Storage units of this nature are usually assembled at a manufacturer's facility by skilled workers, rather than by the end user. In addition, each storage unit is typically configured in a particular size that cannot be easily modified. As such, the storage units often require large amounts of storage space for inventory, and, due to their bulky size when assembled, can be expensive to ship. In addition, many conventional screens cannot be shipped by commercial carriers due to the relatively large size and weight of the screens. For example, United Parcel Service (UPS) has a size limitation of a 130 cumulative inches, which is defined as the circumference of the product plus the height thereof. Since many customers desire to have products shipped via such carriers, whether through orders placed on the internet or over the telephone, it can be advantageous to provide a storage unit meeting such size limitations. At the same time, many customers desire storage units that can be easily assembled without the need for special tools, and which are light weight and portable.

In addition, many conventional storage units cannot be easily reconfigured by the end user to increase or decrease the storage volume, so as to accommodate changing storage needs. Moreover, conventional storage units, such as filing cabinets, can be relatively plain in their appearance.

SUMMARY

Briefly stated, in one aspect of the invention, one embodiment of a storage unit includes a first and second horizontal shelf member, at least one vertical panel disposed between the first and second horizontal shelf members, and at least one tie member. A bottom of the at least one vertical panel is supported by the first shelf member and the second shelf member is supported on a top of the at least one vertical panel. The at least one tie member extends between and connects the first and second horizontal shelf members, with the at least one panel clamped therebetween. In another aspect of the invention, a method for assembling a storage unit is provided.

In a preferred embodiment, the at least one panel comprises a pair of side panels, and the storage unit further comprises a back panel extending between the side panels and a front panel connected to one of the side panels.

In another aspect, an alternative preferred embodiment of the storage units further includes a third shelf, at least one second panel and at least one second tie member. A bottom of the second panel is supported on the second shelf and the third shelf is supported on a top of the second panel. The second tie member extends between and connects the second and third shelf members.

In another aspect of the invention, a storage unit kit has components capable of being assembled into a storage unit. The kit includes a plurality of shelf members, a plurality of side panels, at least one back panel, a plurality of tie members and at least one front panel.

The present inventions provide significant advantages over other storage units. For example, the storage unit can be easily reconfigured by adding additional levels of storage to accommodate the user's needs. In addition, the components of the storage unit can be shipped in an unassembled state and can then be assembled by the end user so as to reduce the shipping volume and attendant expense. Preferably, such a storage unit meets the shipping requirements of various commercial carriers, like UPS. Moreover, end users can maintain a plurality of various individual components in